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ABSTRACT

This paper begins by relating the experiences of a beginning special education teacher in a small school in rural Montana. He soon became frustrated as he lacked the skills required for collaborating with other teachers, students, parents, and the community. Small rural schools have difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified special education teachers because of the overwhelming demands made on people in these positions. A review of the literature on beginning teachers reveals that preservice teachers do not regard collaboration as an important aspect of teaching, and few studies mention collaboration skills as an essential competency. However, teachers need the ability to work cooperatively with their peers. As students become more diverse, teacher collaboration becomes more important in developing educational programs appropriate to students' educational needs. Part of the problem is that teachers view teaching as an independent occupation, rather than seeing their role as being a part of a team. However, faculties at colleges of education are beginning to address the need for training in this area. For example, Montana State University (Billings) has begun offering both undergraduate and graduate education courses in collaboration. This paper suggests that collaboration, along with subject matter content and pedagogical methodology, deserves a place in the professional literature. (LP)

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ED 381 296

WHAT ABOUT READINESS FOR TEACHERS?

After graduating from a small teacher education college in the Northwest, Ken returned home to Montana and began to interview for a teaching position. Although he had a double major in general elementary and special education, he was one of thousands of applicants for fewer than a hundred jobs in Plainsview, a large metropolitan area (pop. 80,000) by Montana standards. After substituting for a semester, Ken heard through the educational grapevine that the resource teacher in a small rural community 300 miles northeast of Plainsview was taking at least a year sabbatical in order to work on her Master's Degree. Ken was not excited about returning to a town on Montana's High Line. Having grown up in the desolate northern reaches of the state, he knew that winters could be long and harsh and that his social life would be limited to Friday or Saturday high school basketball. But, he desperately wanted a room of his own, ownership of his class, and a "real" job. He was eager for the experience of his first teaching position. After all, he had spent five years as an undergraduate, working fast food during the school year, and construction during the summer to prepare to teach. So, he decided to apply to the Blue Spruce school and to his elated amazement landed the position.

Ken spent the summer reviewing class notes and field experience logs. He collected resources and materials for students pre-K through 12th grade. He suspected that Blue Spruce School did not have a large special education budget and he wanted to arrive ready to start on the first day. But when Ken arrived for teacher orientation in late August, he found himself totally unprepared for his new job.

For a year before Ken began his tenure as a long term substitute, the previous special education teacher, Sarah, the general education teachers, and the Blue Spruce Administration had been planning a gradual shift of special education service delivery from a resource model to an inclusive education model. Ken was expected to begin planning programs for special needs students with other teachers. For six of the seven periods during the school day, he would be in general education classrooms, either team teaching, providing special assistance to any student, or securing needed supplementary resources. He did have a small office next to that of the school counselor, but he was expected to inhabit it only before and after school, during his planning period, or at lunch if he were feeling antisocial and chose not to eat with other faculty and staff in the cafeteria. Besides the shock of so much expected collaboration during school hours , it was understood that Ken would work closely with parents and cooperate with community service and state agencies.

At the end of the first week of school, Ken was numb. He was bewildered by the unexpected demands of his new position and completely bereft of collaborative

RC 020017

strategies. He had been prepared to teach, he thought. He had taken methods courses, he knew all about special education categories and their educational implications, he could write effective goals and objectives, but he had no idea how to manage working with the many varied constituencies to whom he was now responsible. He had no experience, no previous knowledge, and no future direction. Ken felt empty.

It generally is accepted that small schools in rural areas have more difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified special education personnel than do larger urban school districts. Although many reasons for this have been posited, a major contributor may be the special education teacher's needing to be all things to all people. Even if the school employs the traditional resource model of special education service delivery, the resource teacher instructs students, consults with teachers, counsels parents, educates administrators, and coordinates related service personnel. The special educator's overwhelming responsibilities often result in individual discouragement, exhaustion, and, often, eventual resignation from teaching.

With the recognition of the benefits of cooperative learning for students and collaboration among educators, faculty at colleges of education are beginning to address the need for training in this area. The faculty of Montana State University-Billings offers both undergraduate and graduate courses in collaboration. The graduate course, SPED 504, Collaboration in Education and the Human Services, is a core course in our Master's Degree programs. The undergraduate course, SPED 420, Individualization and Collaboration in Education, is required of all general elementary education majors and elementary/special education double majors. Several recently published literature reviews of beginning teacher characteristics and competencies, however, make no mention of interpersonal collaborative skill (Brookhart & Freemen, 1992; Kagan, 1992; Reynolds, 1992).

Brookhart and Freeman (1992) reviewed 44 studies conducted between 1975 and 1990 describing the characteristics of preservice teachers. They found that although teacher candidates typically are white females, there is a growing variation in both ethnicity and gender. Education majors had high school academic backgrounds similar to non-education majors, but they differed in their extracurricular interests. Education majors tended to be involved with school spirit activities and with activities involving children. They tended to come from lower income homes with less educated parents than their counterparts who were not majoring in education. Students who enter the teaching profession do so for altruistic reasons. They are service oriented individuals. They expect that field experiences will be their best preparation for teaching, but they recognize the potential value of professional education courses. Education majors are confident that they will be good teachers. Their concerns are with their adequacy as teachers, ability to maintain discipline, and ability to establish student rapport. In this review it was suggested that education majors tended to be more traditional than liberal arts majors in their perceptions of the teacher as "teller" and the student as "learner". No mention was made of preservice teacher perception of their role as collaborator.

Kagan (1992) conducted a review of studies in which professional growth among novice teachers was addressed. She limited her review to studies published between 1987 and 1991. She defined "professional growth" as "changes over time in the behavior, knowledge, images, beliefs, or perceptions of novice teachers" (p. 131). In the review, she demonstrated that novice teachers tend to have a fixed image of themselves as teachers, an image that is based upon previous educational experience that is not modified as a result of teacher education course work.

Pratica experiences could change the novice teacher's self-image, but self-reflection tends to be superficial. Novice teachers envision classrooms and students according to their own experiences and their own learning styles or aptitudes. When the practicum experience results in a very different perception of education with learners quite different from the beginning teacher, the novice may view students as adversaries.

Beginning teachers focus inward seeking confirmation of self as teacher first, and validation of success from student achievement secondarily. In fact, student teachers tend to rate their student teaching experience as successful on the basis of their relationship with their mentoring teacher, rather than on their effect on students. Only after their first year of teaching, did novice educators become multidimensional problem solvers. Kagan suggests that preservice teachers grow in five areas over time: metacognition, acquisition of knowledge about pupils, shift in attention from self to pupil, development of standard instructional and management routines, and growth in problem solving skills. She proposes that preservice teacher education faculty should stress procedural rather than theoretical knowledge, and the relevance of self-reflection for professional growth. Again, there is no mention of the need to develop fundamental interpersonal relations skills for collaboration with co-workers.

Grossman (1992) criticizes both the methodology and content of Kagan's review. Her premise is that student teachers must have the opportunity to study the theory of sound pedagogy while they are learning classroom routines, just as students must have the opportunity for problem solving and higher level thinking while they are practicing basic skills and drills. She stresses the importance of understanding the interrelationship of academic development with management strategy. She does not mention the ever increasing expectations for teacher collaboration.

Reynolds (1992) addressed competent beginning teaching in three teaching areas: preactive, interactive, and postactive. Preactive tasks include planning, setting appropriate expectations for students, and choosing curricular materials. In contrast to competent teachers, novices do not grasp subject matter at the automaticity stage. They perceive student diversity as a problem rather than a given. Interactive teaching tasks involve decision making during instruction, managing the learning environment, presenting the lesson, and evaluating student learning. Novice teachers seem to be unable to use larger amounts of information faced during teaching as the basis for making immediate

instructional decisions. Beginning teachers are concerned with classroom problem solutions, but not in thinking about them in a systematic fashion. They lack "withitness", and the ability to view teaching holistically. Since novice teachers possess a low level of content-specific pedagogical knowledge, they are unable to adjust the level and pace of instruction to student readiness. In addition, their answers or explanations to student questions may not be on target and often fail to link related concepts. Postactive tasks include personal reflection and multiple forms of student assessment. Novice teachers tend to focus on student discipline, classroom management, and lesson presentation, while competent educators reflect on student understanding.

Reynolds states that preservice teachers should be taught subject matter, be prepared to understand their students' backgrounds, be provided strategies for maintaining a learning community, be well versed in appropriate pedagogy, and be guided in reflection of their own teaching. She believes that we should expect beginning teachers to be able to plan lessons, develop rapport with students, establish classroom rules and routines, arrange positive physical and social classroom conditions, relate new subject matter to prior student knowledge, assess student learning, and reflect on their own actions in order to improve instruction. No mention is made in either her review or her proposals for developing the collaborative acuity of novice teachers.

As teachers begin working professionally, they require the ability to work cooperatively with their peers. As students become more diverse, teacher collaboration becomes more imperative in order to develop educational programs appropriate for each individual. Students who currently are enrolled in teacher education programs, recent graduates, and those just choosing to enter the teaching profession do not have experience with collaboration. They have not witnessed it in their own education, therefore, they envision teaching as an independent occupation. Their self-image as a teacher is more likely to be as a rugged individualist than as a team member. Although college of education faculty are beginning to offer training in educational collaboration, there has not been a recognition of collaboration training as an essential component of teacher education. Collaboration, along with subject matter content and pedagogical methodology, deserves a place in the professional literature.

Students majoring in elementary and secondary education, whether general or special, may not realize that increasingly they will be required to work collaboratively as a partner or as a team member with other teachers. They neither envision themselves as an educational team player nor grasp the profound implications of educational collaboration. It is the responsibility of teacher educators, then, to tell them, to prepare them for a restructured school, and to ready them for a role different from that of an isolated teacher behind the closed classroom door.

We contend that the professional preparation of teachers needs to begin with asking each prospective student: Do you like children? Why? And, at that point in time, put them in a classroom in order to determine if they can collaborate with students. As they continue their studies, more time needs to be spent reframing

their understanding of teaching and of educational practice so that they can be effective collaborators who provide effective instruction to students in the most caring of ways.

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